



## The Lagoon

*Joseph Conrad*

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*The Lagoon* is a short story by Joseph Conrad composed in 1896 and first published in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1897. The story is about a white man, referred to as "Tuan", who is travelling through an Indonesian rainforest and is forced to stop for the night with a distant Malay friend named Arsot. Upon arriving, he finds Arsot distraught, for his lover is dying. Arsot tells the distant and rather silent white man a story of his past.

## The Lagoon Details

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## From Reader Review The Lagoon for online ebook

### **Kalvin Moschkau says**

This is some of the best writing I have ever come across. Excellent foray into Conrad.

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### **Vahid says**

Conrad was a Polish writer . He wrote in English , I could feel the sham style behind the text , yet his story was great.

Like it or not, We all come across junctures in which we don't know which road to take ,this reminds me of Robert Frost's poem ;Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Now , sometimes life sucks because we encounter dilemmas in which we really don't know which road to take .

Life sucks more deeply when others make you choose one road . It's painful to imagine that you have to choose one , mother or father , brother or sister , the love of your life or your family , others or yourself , ample dilemmas.....

In this story Conrad shows us a man who loved his brother passionately , and was head over heels in love with a lady .

He elopes with his beloved alongside with his brother , they are being stalked and his brother stays to thwart those following them , he falls and shouts for help , but Arsat keeps running with his beloved . Later his beloved dies , Conrad exploits an exquisite sentence by saying that 'She burns no more' . Now Arsat is stuck with the pain and he carries the chagrin growing heavy on him everyday ...

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### **Brenda says**

#### **MEH**

Not my thing, bro.

I always get bored with genres I don't like. I should stop doing this.

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### **Marts (Thinker) says**

An interesting tale by Conrad. Its the story about a white man travelling through an Indonesian rainforest who stops for the night with a distant Malay friend named Arsat, who's lover is dying. Arsat then tells the white man the story of his past...

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### **Librofilia\_it says**

L'ambientazione di questo racconto breve, è quella tipica di quei luoghi tanto cari a Joseph Conrad ovvero i mari e le isole tropicali, con le loro foreste e le loro lagune.

Il racconto è incentrato su un'amicizia nata durante i "tempi duri", su una confessione fatta da uno dei due - forse nella speranza di alleggerire il proprio fardello interiore - e su quel senso di fascino e di timore che solo alcuni luoghi remoti sanno donare, soprattutto nel silenzio della notte, con le stelle luminose e alte nel cielo e dinanzi al fuoco ardente e scoppettante.

In questo racconto di Joseph Conrad c'è un senso imminente di catastrofe e di fine inevitabile che vengono però scacciate via, grazie alle stilettate lanciate dalla vita, dalla morte e dall'accettazione del proprio destino.

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### **Azma Humayun says**

Haunting. Lyrical. Chilling. Beautiful.

So much emotion packed into such a short story.

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### **D. E. says**

The Lagoon is not a classical movie. The movie was made to show off two up and coming actors. Hollywood can take a masterpiece and make a fantastic movie or blow it. Two young people stranded in a deserted

island would seem the perfect situation to introduce young love to the public. The novel by James Conrad is one of his most popular, especially in our ever changing society. This is an excellent read for the genre.....DEHS

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### **Adele Emami says**

Conrad's combination of words mesmerized me...involved my feeling to the extent i cried some tears while reading!

I totally appreciate this work...

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### **David says**

This short story I consider Conrad's masterpiece. I've probably read it at least four times, and shall reread it again for its beauty of mood, style, setting, and poignant story line. Haunting. Lyrical. Chilling. Beautiful. So much emotion packed into such a short story.

It begins with the white man Tuan telling his Malay steersman "We will pass the night in Arsat's clearing. It is late." Then within a short time, with Arsat's woman Diamelen dreadfully ill, Arsat begins to tell how they came to be in this raised house on the remote hidden lagoon. ". . . for where can we lay down the heaviness of our trouble but in a friend's heart? A man must speak of war and of love. You, Tuan, know what war is, and you have seen me in time of danger seek death as other men seek life! A writing may be lost; a lie may be written; but what the eye has seen is truth and remains in the mind!... There's no worse enemy and no better friend than a brother, Tuan, for one brother knows another, and in perfect knowledge is strength for good or evil."

The tragedy slowly unfolds, dramatically, in beautiful writing, and the story ends before dawn. Diamelen dies during the night. The white man offers to wait and take Arsat away from this lagoon and place of her death - but no, Arsat replies "We are sons of the same mother--and I left him in the midst of enemies; but I am going back now." Conrad ends the story as Arsat "looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions."

About 1990 I was asked by the Allen Press (Saul and Lillian Marks' superior private hand hand press in Los Angeles) to recommend a Conrad story that it should consider printing in a fine limited edition. This short story was my recommendation. I believe they did in fact design and may have printed the story, though I've not seen or held a copy in hand.

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### **Evelyn says**

Read this for my literature class. It's a deep story, a story within a story. It portrays death, betrayal. I love the symbolism that it has.

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## **Emily Skye says**

I'm not giving this a star rating because I read it for school and I didn't pay enough attention to it to really have an opinion, and that's just not fair to the story.

If I did give it a rating I'd give it a 1.5. It was okay, just meh. It was short which was good because I really didn't care about it. Sorry Conrad.

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## **Angela Dwyer says**

Beautiful sad tragic tale of what one will do for love. Full of symbolism and imagery well worth a read.

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## **Iain Hamill says**

12/100 Glimpse of Truth Short Stories

Adjective-heavy (e.g. "The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wonder of death - of death near, unavoidable and unseen, soothed the unease of his race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. The ever ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out of the stillness round him - into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence.") but still an engrossing fireside tale.

Once you stop counting the number of descriptive words per sentence and allow the writing to carry you along you find yourself able to smell the smoke of the fire and feel the heat of the languid oppressive night.

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## **Tristram says**

### **Know Your Brother? Know Yourself!**

"There's no worse enemy and no better friend than a brother, [...] for one brother knows another, and in perfect knowledge is strength for good or evil."

These words should be taken seriously by anyone who longs to be a good writer because there is vast potential for tragedy in them – and the greatest of all Russian writers has, in his day and age, shown how to use the potential to the max. However, Joseph Conrad's short story *The Lagoon* exploits another source of tragedy, even though the protagonist of the story, a Malay called Arsat, uses the above words to introduce the tale of his love and his betrayal, which he is going to tell once he finds himself on the brink of being bereft of the woman for whose sake he took a glimpse into the depths of his soul. One can say that it is not the knowledge of his brother but his deplorable lack of knowledge of himself that plunges him into tragedy and fills even the cup of his love with many a drop of bitterness.

The story in a nutshell: An unnamed white man, travelling along a river, decides to spend the night in a lagoon, where his Malay friend Arsat lives in an old house, together with his beloved woman, Diamelen. The place has a reputation for being haunted, or ill-omened, and when the white man arrives, he finds Arsat in utter despair over a fever that is wasting his beloved woman away. As recovery seems impossible, Arsat tells his friend the story of his love, and it is basically this: When Arsat falls in love with Diamelen, he sees no way towards living his love but elopement since Diamelen is promised to someone else. His brother, more valiant and more doughty than he, promises to help him because he regards himself and his brother as men who simply take what they want. Soon, however, their plan is discovered, and the two brothers and Diamelen are pursued by the men of their tribe. Arsat's brother tries to win them some time in order for his brother to prepare a canoe for them, by fighting their chasers in order to join his group and to complete their flight together. Unfortunately, Arsat sees how his brother trips and is overtaken by their enemies, and instead of helping him, who desperately calls out his name, he gets himself and Diamelen in safety by casting off the boat before he even realizes what he is doing. Never being able to forget how he left his brother to die, he withdraws, with his woman, to the lagoon, where everything is stillness – and where darkness and fog creep in on them as he tells his story, while Diamelen is dying from her fever. When she is dead, the white man offers Arsat to take him with them but the hapless Malay refuses, saying that now he will seek out his enemies in an attempt to atone for his former betrayal of his brother.

As is usual with Joseph Conrad, this impressive little story – it's probably one of his shortest short stories, and does honour to the model of the perfect short story as conceived by Poe – overwhelms the reader with colourful, image-laden language, and had therefore best be read aloud. The beginning, which gives an impression on the unnamed white man's journey along the river, already conjures up the mood and atmosphere of Conrad's masterpiece *Heart of Darkness*, when we get sentences like

” And the white man's canoe, advancing upstream in the shortlived disturbance of its own making, seemed to enter the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had forever departed.”

In sentences like these, there are dark whisperings of the great indifference of nature, of the universe, towards the individual sufferings and joys of man. The stillness, pervading the scenery, and the darkness surrounding the men can also be seen as symbols of Arsat's feeling that he lost his honour when he deserted his brother and decided to hide with Diamelen in that death-like lagoon. In a way, Arsat's situation also foreshadows the inner conflict Conrad's eponymous hero suffers from in his later novel *Lord Jim*. In both Arsat's and Jim's cases, a man is surprised to find himself react, in the face of danger, in a way that is completely different from what he would have supposed, and so, in both cases, their tragedy is rooted in their ignorance about themselves.

In the end, we leave Arsat like this:

”Arsat had not moved. He stood lonely in the searching sunshine; and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions.”

... and we can only surmise whether he will muster up his courage to return and face those men who killed his brother, wondering all the while whether doing so will really prove the best choice for him.

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## Ivana Books Are Magic says

The Lagoon opens up with a white man, but the story is really about the man's Malaysian friend Arsat. Framed narrative, quite common in Conrad's works, works quite well in this one. Tuan (the white man) serves the same function as Marlow the narrator in Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim. It may seem an unnecessary complication in a short story, but framed narrative actually helps to set a tone and atmosphere as well as to provide additional commentary.

Tuan visits his old friend Arsat, only to find out that Arsat's beloved wife is dying. Arsat then tells Tuan the tragic history of their love. The story itself is very powerful, yet the conversation between the two men gives it additional meaning. It is a conversation that can offer no comfort- perhaps precisely because of it, the dialogue between them feels honest and raw.

What can one person say to another after such a tale of betrayal and sadness? What would you say if you were Tuan? What would you do if you were Arsat? This is where the framed narrative really makes sense, as it makes the reader ponder the harshness of life, and gives the reader a chance to reflect on the horrible choices we are all sometimes forced to make. I won't reveal anything else to avoid spoilers, still it is certainly a powerful story driven by a serious moral dilemma.

This short story is the shortest work by this author that I read, but it is, nevertheless, poignant with tragedy and symbolism. It is written as beautifully as Conrad's best works, yet what particularly fascinated me is the perfect of its form. It is one of the most perfect short stories I have ever read- this is how it is done. It is amazing how much can be conveyed with so few words.

Truth be told as a fan of Conrad's writing, I may be more inclined (even motivated?) to read more into it. Nevertheless, even after mentally forcing myself to make some time to observe it without connecting it to other Conrad's other works, I have found it to be pretty amazing and rich in meaning. Perhaps those who love Conrad's prose will enjoy it more, but even those unfamiliar with this author might like it. I've only read it recently, but I've already reread it a few times, tonight being the last time. What does that tell you about it?

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This is a very moving short story, filled with sadness, but balanced out with beauty. I have a feeling that The Lagoon will haunt me. A few short stories have impressed me as much as this one. I would go as far as to suggest that The Lagoon is a masterpiece of the short story form.

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